

SHIFTING GEARS

THE CHANGING MEANING OF WORK IN MASSACHUSETTS, 1920-1980

GARDNER, MASSACHUSETTS

INTERVIEWEE: Helen Erickson

INTERVIEWER: Martha Norkunas

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TRANSCRIBER: Lynda Luden

TAPE ONE, SIDE A

MN: Mrs. Erickson, I want (noise in background), now you stay there, I want to ask you first about, who in your family first, well, where's your family from, what country did they come from?

HE: Poland.

MN: Poland. And who in your family came to the United States?

HE: My father and mother came here.

MN: Were they married in Poland already?

HE: They were married here.

MN: And did they come right to Gardner?

HE: Well, my mother lived in New York and then she came to Gardner.

MN: And your father went to New York, too?

HE: No, he was here.

MN: Do you know why they ended up coming to Gardner?

HE: No, I don't.

MN: OK. Did they work at Heywood's.

HE: No.

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MN: 'Cause sometimes people came here because they knew there was a furniture factory or some other kind of factory.

HE: No. They didn't work in Heywood's. My mother was doing housework for Jewish people and my father worked in the foundry.

MN: In the foundry?

HE: Um hmm.

MN: What was that?

HE: Foundry.

MN: In Gardner?

HE: Yes, they had, had, they had two of them.

MN: And what did they make? I don't know what a foundry is.

HE: From iron or brick, I don't know really.

MN: What, some kind of metal work?

HE: I don't really know what it was.

MN: And were you born in Gardner?

HE: Yes.

MN: Did you grow up speaking Polish?

HE: Yes.

MN: I wish that my parents had spoke another language. So Polish you learned before English?

HE: Oh, yeah. I went to school, I couldn't speak English.

MN: School in English? Yeah? Sometimes kids say that was hard.

HE: Oh, was it hard to learn English.

MN: Because they didn't give you lessons, you just--

HE: You had to pick it up on your own and learn it in school.

MN: Oh. And then you'd come home and speak Polish?

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HE: Yes.

MN: Did you have brothers and sisters?

HE: I had a twin sister and I got two brothers.

MN: So at least you had your sister then, in school.

HE: I had her with me, yeah.

MN: And then that even made it harder, 'cause you would talk to her in Polish.

HE: Yeah, that's true.

MN: Was there a Polish neighborhood?

HE: Yes.

MN: Is this it, where we are now?

HE: No, was around C _____ and L _____ Street.

MN: Is that where the Polish church is?

HE: Yes, that's where the Polish people used to be. There's very few left.

MN: Oh, where did they go?

HE: Died and--

MN: Moved away?

HE: --all the old timers died.

MN: Do you go to the Polish club?

HE: Yes.

MN: There's more than one, isn't there?

HE: There was one.

MN: The Polish American Citizens Club?

HE: Yeah, up on Pleasant Street.

MN: And do you still go to Polish church?

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HE: No, I go Irish Church.

MN: (laughs) You could _____(unintelligible). Is your husband Polish?

HE: No, he was Swedish.

MN: Oh. Did people care if you married one or the other? You know?

HE: Well, they sort of did.

MN: 'Cause my mother had a very hard time, she's Irish and she married Lithuanian. They didn't want her, I don't think her family wanted him.

HE: That's the way it really was. Most.

MN: 'Cause I haven't heard of Polish-Swedish marrying.

HE: Around here there's a lot of them. 'Cause there were a lot of Swedes living around here then. Most all of them are passed away, all the old timers, too.

MN: But, was it your parents that minded more, or his parents?

HE: He didn't have any parents. Well, my parents didn't mind it.

MN: 'Cause this was in Lowell and the Lithuanian priest wouldn't marry them. He wouldn't perform the ceremony in the Catholic Church. So they went to the Irish priest and he married them. And when I'm in there, the guy that's the priest is not the same one, and I sometimes see him and I tell him that, and he says, "Well, that was how they felt in the old days."

HE: In those days, yeah.

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MN: 'Cause even I spoke to some other woman, she's French-Canadian and her husband's Polish and she said they didn't, they didn't want her. She could tell it in the beginning. Funny. 'Cause he's Catholic, too, yeah, your husband?

HE: Yeah, he turned.

MN: And then when did you start to work at Heywood-Wakefield?

HE: In '62, I guess it was.

MN: So you were already married.

HE: Um hmm. And I worked there long before that, but I didn't work that long. But I worked there. I worked in the fiber tacking room, making hampers.

MN: When was that? More or less?

HE: Oh, I was eighteen, I guess.

MN: And you finished High school, did you?

HE: No, I didn't, I was working in Heywood's.

MN: So, this was before that. Did you go to high school?

HE: Yeah, I quit.

MN: To go to work, or what?

HE: I went to work. Yeah.

MN: Did most of the kids quit high school so they could go to work?

HE: Hmmm, I don't think so, no.

MN: 'Cause some families expected their kids--

HE: My family was really mad when I left.

MN: Oh, they wanted you to stay.

HE: But I wanted to work.

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MN: And how long did you work at Heywood's that time?

HE: I don't know because I was in the fiber tacking room then I went to wrapping.

MN: Wrapping--?

HE: Chairs. Little rockers.

MN: Childrens?

HE: Yes.

MN: Or were they toys?

HE: What?

MN: Were they toy rockers or they were--?

HE: No, they were for children.

MN: So how long, was it two or three years you worked there or longer, do you think?

HE: Must have been about two years, anyway.

MN: And what did you do in the fiber packing room?

HE: Make hampers. You had a, oh, that was hard. You had to pull that breed (??) and make sure that everything was tight. We had some pliers that we used to pull it with and put tacks right in. Your hands were sore.

MN: Oh, 'cause you wouldn't have gloves. And would you make the whole hamper or part of it?

HE: Well, we make it all around, you know? And then somebody would put covers on, they weren't from fiber.

MN: Were the, the covers weren't made out of the--?

HE: Not from fiber, no.

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MN: Did they have to train you how to do it?

HE: Yes.

MN: Did you get paid while you were training?

HE: Yes.

MN: And then, was there any kind of conveyor belt, or--?

HE: No.

MN: Was it a room, how was it?

HE: Just a plain room where you worked.

MN: Were there tables and chairs?

HE: Tables, yes, we had benches.

MN: And would the women all fit around it?

HE: Well, we had to stand to do that job.

MN: Oh, you stood up. And was it all women or men and women?

HE: I can't remember.

MN: Remember, yeah.

HE: Must have been both, I guess.

MN: Did people feel like it was kind of a craft, or was it just a job?

HE: It's a job, it was a job, they did everything there then.

MN: Did you get a choice of what department you'd go to?

HE: No, they put you where they needed you.

MN: And then would they switch you when you wanted or were you asked to go to the other departments?

HE: No, I don't know how they did it to me, whether I asked or whether they put me there.

MN: And what was the next place you said?

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HE: Wrapping rockers and, you know, children's rockers.

MN: Did you like it better or worse?

HE: Oh, yeah, it was easier.

MN: And how was that room.

HE: The same like any room, you work on the bench.

MN: You said that's the place you sit or the table you work on.

HE: The table you work on.

MN: 'Cause I'm trying to picture it and I can't, since I was never in there, you know, I can't see it in my mind. So there would be a number of people working--?

HE: Yeah, all around, yeah.

MN: And would you talk, talk to the others when you--?

HE: Oh, yeah, you work side by side, you could talk.

MN: Did you get friends with any of the others.

HE: Oh, yeah, we were friends.

MN: Even in the early days.

HE: Oh, yeah.

MN: 'Cause there probably were other young people that went there.

HE: They were much older than me, but-

MN: Would you see them after work?

HE: No, I mean, everybody would go home, you know.

MN: And then, why did you quit work at that time?

HE: Why, I went to the shoe shop.

MN: In Gardner?

HE: Yes.

MN: Oh, I didn't know they had shoe shops.

HE: Well, they had it down on Main Street.

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MN: Was it more money?

HE: No.

MN: You wanted a change?

HE: Was easier. And it was a change.

MN: And did you work there for a long time?

HE: Yeah, I worked there a long time. Down the shoe shop, yeah.

MN: And was that the same, making shoes?

HE: Making shoes, stitching, I was mostly a stitcher, making eyelets in the shoes.

MN: And, was it men and women there also?

HE: Oh, yeah.

MN: And how was that different from Heywood's?

HE: Well, they made shoes there.

MN: Yeah. Were they better in _____(unintelligible) in terms of the company?

HE: No they were, I mean, I didn't have any problems anywhere.

MN: 'Cause you were saying before that Simplex was such a good company.

HE: Oh, I really like to work there, they're very good.

MN: And then, did you, somewhere along the line, you got married, right?

HE: Yeah.

MN: Did you meet your husband at the shoe shop?

HE: No. He was in Hedstrom's. But then they moved to Alabama.

MN: Did you move to Alabama, too?

HE: No, we live here, he got another job somewhere. In some

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chair factory.

MN: Did most of the guys work in furniture?

HE: He used to work in Heywood's, welding.

MN: Oh, I met someone the other day from the welding department.

HE: Yeah, he used to work there. He worked there for years.

MN: After you were married?

HE: Yeah.

MN: And did he stay in the welding department the whole time, or he switched around?

HE: Then he went to the wood shop and he didn't care for it so he quit.

MN: It sounds like it wasn't very hard to get a job.

HE: No.

MN: How, you just went up the the place and said, "Got any work?"

HE: Yeah.

MN: And, after you got married, did you still work?

HE: No.

MN: 'Cause that's one of the things I'm trying to find out if people still, still worked after they got married.

HE: No, I didn't. 'Cause where I used to work, there were no married women allowed. So, and then jobs were pretty hard to get, so.

MN: Once you got married they said that's it?

HE: Not where I worked. I worked in the chair factory, they wouldn't allow any married women, so.

MN: So this was after the shoe factory you went to the chair factory?

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HE: Um hmm.

MN: Do you know the name of it?

HE: Arlington Chairs.

MN: And they said that, that after you got married, that was it?
How did you feel about it?

HE: What could you do? It's no, it's no.

MN: Would, was Heywood's the same way? Could you work there
after you got married?

HE: Heywood's took anybody, married, women, or anybody, I guess.

MN: Did they say why you couldn't?

HE: No.

MN: So you stopped working then, huh?

HE: Yeah, I had to.

MN: And then when was it that you went back to work?

HE: Oh, I went back, I worked at the meat containers, but they
were laying off and calling me back, laying off and calling me
back, so then I decided I'd go down to Heywood's, I had one more
chip(??) coming, so Red Riley, I knew him, he said, "I'll get you
in and he did.

MN: Do you know, go ahead.

HE: I went into the paint shop spraying stain.

MN: And again, did they have to show you how to do that?

HE: Yes.

MN: Were these jobs hard to learn?

HE: Huh?

MN: Was it hard to learn?

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HE: No, wasn't hard. Was very dirty. Had to change clothes in the dressing room up there.

MN: Oh, you'd wear your own clothes and then change? Was it a uniform, or something?

HE: But you can't wear the clothes that are good because you get them in stain.

MN: So would you old clothes, your old clothes you brought?

HE: Yes.

MN: Would they give you some kind of jacket or something to wear?

HE: NO.

MN: Or aprons?

HE: They gave aprons.

MN: Did you have gloves?

HE: No.

MN: So did the stain get on your hands?

HE: Yes.

MN: Probably stays there, too, huh?

HE: Terrible. And that's where I stayed, in the paint shop.

MN: Why did you decide to stay in that shop, if it was dirty and--?

HE: Well, twelve and a half years, you know, I used to hate to move around. So I figure I'll stay where I am. Then when I heard that they were gonna close I decided to go to Simplex. I think it was two years before they closed I went into Simplex.

MN: Oh, so you worked there, let's see, that was around '76, that was '66--

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HE: '70, '62--

MN: Was when you started.

HE: I went in to Simplex in '74.

MN: Did many of the people from Heywood's when they heard they were going to close, did they quit?

HE: Yeah, quite a bit were leaving.

MN: Did they get laid off or did they quit?

HE: They were quitting, they were leaving, they wanted to make sure they had a job, I guess.

MN: And why did you think of going to Simplex?

HE: Well, it was near and they said it's easier to work there.

MN: And tell me about Simplex, was that a different kind of work, what did you do there?

HE: I had the sub-assembly for clocks.

MN: Now, I have no idea what that means.

HE: Well, it's different things you make. Different parts for clocks.

MN: And you, how--?

HE: You have to wire, I was wiring and soldering, you got to make sure those wires are in the right place, or the clock won't work.

MN: Oh, like attach the red one to the--

HE: The red wire and the blue wire and you got to remember where to put the, when you solder.

MN: So did you, how did you learn that? Watch the person next to you, or did they give you classes or--?

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HE: No, some guy came and he was teaching me. Taught me for a couple days, sat with me and then he thought I was doing good and he went back on his own job.

MN: Oh, so every new person, they have somebody come over and show them, one on one?

HE: Then there were other jobs that they taught me, so I knew quite a bit of jobs down at Simplex.

MN: Oh, so you could move around?

HE: Um hmm.

MN: Did you? And did you work around a bench there, too?

HE: They had benches, yes.

MN: So it was similiar in a way, to Heywood's?

HE: Anywhere you go, there's benches you work on.

MN: And then there's people on either side of you and across from you, too.

HE: Yeah.

MN: So you got to know them?

HE: Oh, yeah, you get to know them.

MN: Was that any different, did you feel any different about doing that kind of work' cause that must, you have to pay--

HE: Well, at first it was hard because you're used to working with big furniture. But after awhile, it got to me and I was all right. Like my boss told me, you're going to find it very hard at first, because seeing you worked in the paint shop where you have big furniture, he says, it's gonna be altogether different and it certainly was.

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MN: 'Cause it was small?

HE: Huh?

MN: 'Cause it was so small?

HE: Yeah, small screws, and, ooh, but I liked it.

MN: Did you like it better than doing the furniture?

HE: Oh, believe me, I did. (laughs) You would _____
(unintelligible) that stain, you come home you smell stain--

MN: That--

HE: --but it was a job, and I didn't like to move around, keep changing so I stayed there.

MN: Tell me a little bit about room, that stain room. Was it called a stain room?

HE: Well, paint shop, yeah. And then I was repairing in there, some had to be repaired, you work on the conveyor and you go with that conveyor. You worked. Believe me. I did. And then after, I didn't care for it, because you had to work too hard on that conveyor repairing so they had a job posted for burning in so I took a burning in job. It's a hard job, but at least I was on my own, I wasn't on the conveyor which was easier for me.

MN: In the stain room was that conveyor, too?

HE: Stain room, oh, yeah.

MN: So you had to spray paint as they came around on the conveyor.

HE: It wasn't paint shop, but the other paint shop where I sprayed there was no convey-, I sprayed and then they were wiping it and then they put it on the conveyor. I didn't have to spray on the conveyor.

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MN: In the other paint shop, you did?

HE: Yes.

MN: (Unintelligible)

HE: I had to, oh, yes, there were three, I had to spray on the conveyor in one of the paint shops, when the, somebody was out they put me on, and I sprayed and boy, you keep up with that conveyor, or else.

MN: Why did they have a conveyor in one place and not in the other?

HE: Well, they had the conveyor, but it was after they wiped the stain they put it on there.

MN: But in the other area--

HE: But I didn't have to spray on the conveyor, which made it real good.

MN: But in the other one, they put, made you have to spray on the conveyor.

HE: On the conveyor.

MN: What about the third paint job, was there a conveyor?

HE: Oh, no, you just, I, I'd go down, I was about the only one he used to send me down, and I did tables. I stained them and I wiped them and I repaired them.

MN: So that couldn't be on the conveyor, if you did all that--

HE: No. that wasn't done on the conveyor.

MN: Did they always have a conveyor, or did they bring that in at some time?

HE: In the big paint shop, they always had a conveyor.

MN: And how many people worked in that room?

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HE: I don't know, quite a bit.

MN: Like a hundred, or--?

HE: No, I wouldn't say, at least 50 or 60, I think.

MN: And in the little, the other rooms, the other two paint rooms were smaller?

HE: Yeah, but still doing quite a bit, quite a bit of people working there, because they were repairing and sanding on the conveyor, you know. So there was quite a bit of people, too, working there.'

MN: In the big paint room, did they also sand and repair? Or just spray paint?

HE: Yeah, sanded and repaired.

MN: I'm trying to figure out why they had it in one room but not in the other room.

HE: I don't know, either. They used to sand on the conveyor in the big paint shop. It'd keep going round and round, they were sanding.

MN: So you'd be doing your sanding and the piece of furniture be moving?

HE: I don't know how they kept up with it.

MN: And when you sprayed, the furniture would move, too?

HE: Oh, yeah, you got to be fast.

MN: And you have to spray all around it, right?

HE: Yeah, that's right.

MN: Was it a whole assembled table that you painted?

HE: No, that was downstairs, no. Well, the table, yeah, that was assembled and I had to spray it under and wipe it under and

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eVerything.

MN: You just did that--

HE: But there was no, there was no conveyor, so I didn't have to rush with that one.

MN: Would you have to do the whole table or just the underside?

HE: The whole table.

MN: The legs, too.

HE: Oh, yeah. And under and you wiped it under and the top and everything.

MN: Did you get paid by the number of tables you did?

HE: Yeah, I did. Piecework.

MN: Everywhere? The conveyor and not the conveyor? So if you did ten tables an hour you'd get X amount of money. Five tables an hour you'd get half as much. How did they pay, do you remember? Was it a dollar a table or something?

HE: Oh, gee, I can't (laughs, both laugh) I have no idea, well, I can't remember what the rates were, but not a dollar. Oh, no. Some rates were good, some rates weren't, you know.

MN: How'd they figure out how much?

HE: Well, they give you a rate and you, they tell you how many to do an hour and you get so and so much.

MN: Oh, if you do more than that, then you get extra?

HE: Yeah.

MN: But if you did less than that?

HE: You get less.

MN: Oh. How many, do you remember how many an hour you were supposed to do?

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HE: No, I can't remember, that's so long ago.

MN: You must have got it down to a system, though, huh?

HE: Yeah, I had my own way of doing everything already. You get your own way, so you know just how to lay 'em down on that round table where you're going to spray and everything and, so things go right with you.

MN: Did you try different ways before you figured it out?

HE: Oh, yeah, you got to find the easiest way so you can make money. (laughs) Oh, yeah.

MN: I bet everybody does that.

HE: Oh, everybody was doing it, you have to, to make money.

MN: And everybody had their own way?

HE: Everybody had their own way of working.

MN: Did you have to concentrate, I mean, did it take your mind?

HE: Well, no, I was just thinking, well, maybe I'll try it this way, maybe it'll go better, then, I says, I'll try another one another way, maybe that will go better, then you find your way and it goes good.

MN: And could you talk to the person, even though he was painting and wiping?

HE: Oh, yeah.

MN: You must have come up with some good stories--

HE: You really couldn't do too much if you talked too much, because you're not concentrating, really, keeping your mind on the job so you really had to work.

MN: Yeah, I didn't think of that.

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HE: Then you didn't want to bother the other people when they were working because some didn't like to talk, they can't talk and work, you know, so--

MN: Did they have radios or music?

HE: No.

MN: 'Cause they have some places they pipe in the music.

HE: Simplex.

MN: Oh, they did? But Heywood-Wakefield didn't do that?

HE: No.

MN: Would the bosses come around and check on you?

HE: No, not really.

MN: So they didn't have those timer guys that came and checked to see if--

HE: Yeah.

MN: Oh, they did?

HE: Oh, yeah. Time study. They're the ones that give you your rates if you get some new furniture to spray on or to do anything.

MN: Oh, so you would just do one particular kind of table then, or you sprayed all kinds?

HE: Different kind, they had numbers on.

MN: And you get paid a different rate--

HE: And you get a little tag out with that number on and you know what that rate is.

MN: So different tables, different rates? So they had to figure out--

HE: I did chairs, and I did, that, that, those kind tables

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MN: Like this one?

HE: Yeah, and I did this, this kind.

MN: But I would think that's hard because there's so much detail.

HE: I know you got different rates on them.

MN: And then you had to wipe off each of those little tiny spindles.

HE: They had to, I had wipers working for me, girls that were wiping.

MN: Oh, so you were just, was it some kind of machine you sprayed with?

HE: A gun, yeah.

MN: And then you go, Shhhh, like that?

HE: Um hmm. You had to spray all over and under and everywhere.

MN: And then they would wipe it for you?

HE: Yeah, and they'd have to blow with a thing to make sure all the stain is out.

MN: Oh, like a hair dryer, like that?

HE: No, it's, I don't know, it's some, what it is. And they put them on the, you had a man that would put them on the conveyor and then have, this, somebody would put, a man would put spray sealer on it and and there'd be women sanding the sealer and then they'd have a man that would put the lacquer on, all on the conveyor, they worked like that.

MN: And all in the same room?

HE: Yes, the conveyor keeps going around.

MN: Oh, I thought it went into the other rooms, but it just goes around.

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HE: And then, and then if they found anything wrong with the table, any spots or anything, they'd put it aside and they had repair girls repairing it. Repair women.

MN: Would that be in the same room, too?

HE: Yes, everything was in the same room,

MN: What they call that woman again?

HE: Repair. They had to repair.

MN: But it wasn't in the same room that you spray painted in?

HE: Yes, it was. Everything was in the same room.

MN: What floor was that?

HE: Oh, I can't remember whether it was the third--

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE A

TAPE ONE, SIDE B

MN: Flat iron building. I think everything happened there. So far nobody I know worked in that building. You were on the Pine St. side?

HE: Yeah, was the, but on the inside of the Pine St., I'm pretty sure.

MN: And you know that conveyor belt that went around and round in that one room?

HE: Yeah

MN: Did it connect to the other rooms?

HE: No.

MN: Oh.

HE: They had their own in the other room.

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MN: Oh, you know, I had this picture in my mind of one conveyor belt going around the whole company.

HE: No, they had their own in the other rooms.

MN: Could you slow it down or speed it up?

HE: No. Not that I knew of.

MN: Did they ever speed it up while you were there?

HE: No, if we couldn't keep up we just, we yelled, we got to shut it off, do some repair on it, on the conveyor.

MN: And that would shut it down? Who would shut it down?

HE: A man that, somebody that was there.

MN: It could be anybody?

HE: Oh--

MN: It didn't have to be the foreman.

HE: You couldn't always keep up with it, don't forget. It was hard.

MN: Did they get mad if you called to shut it down?

HE: No. Well, the furniture was really big.

MN: Oh, yeah.

HE: If you had to repair it, you know.

MN: What kind of repairs would you do?

HE: Well, like the _____ (unintelligible) sometimes it scratches, you have to take the sander, sandpaper, all the way down to make sure that you're doing a good job and then you have to go with the stain. Then you wiped that.

MN: Oh, to make sure that the scratch, if it went all the way into the wood--

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HE: That they're off.

MN: So they'd rather have you do a careful job than a fast job.

HE: That's right. And do it good.

MN: Did you get in trouble if you let something pass by you that had a scratch?

HE: No, once in a while one of the bosses would stop and speak to you. I used to put my initials in the back when I did it anyway, so I'd know it was mine.

MN: With a pen or something?

HE: Chalk.

MN: Did everybody do that?

HE: A few of us were doing it, because the new kids, kids that would come in, you know, that try and get away and try and blame the older help. We'd look in the back and then we say, "Huh uh, not mine, the initials." Well, that's the only way.

MN: Yeah, of course. Did they hire a lot of new people while you were there?

HE: Well, they were hiring and the kids were quitting. Lot of young ones and they wouldn't stay long. Some would stay half a day. Some would stay a week or so and, you know how kids work.

MN: Kids, you mean--

HE: Some were good workers but others didn't care to work.

MN: Like 18, 19, is that--

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HE: Yeah.

MN: And would they be local kids.

HE: Yeah, most were from around here.

MN: Boys or girls.

HE: Boys and girls.

MN: 'Cause when you said about wipers, it sounded like girls.

Were all the wipers girls?

HE: Yeah, the wipers were mostly girls.

MN: And what about the sanders?

HE: The sanders were all women, too. Older, middle aged women.

Who else would do it, was so hard.

MN: Oh, so sometimes, some jobs the men didn't do.

HE: No.

MN: Were the wipers considered women's jobs?

HE: Oh, well, the women did repair work and sanding, most of it. Burning in.

MN: Can you tell me what that is? I had somebody else explain it, but I want to make sure I understand it.

HE: The what?

MN: Burning in.

HE: Oh, it's just the little splinter holes they give you something to try and fill the thing in there and you have a hot iron and then you try and even it up, sand it, and go over it with stain.

MN: And so it should look like a clear, perfect--

HE: Yeah.

MN: Is that considered part of the repair work?

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HE: Well, yeah, that was more, had to more careful with that than repair work

MN: You could make the hole bigger--

HE: Because they were like little splits.

MN: Also, they were supposed to look for that all along the way, right? Was there a special room for burning in?

HE: No, they worked on the conveyor.

MN: 'Cause it seems to me mostly women did the burning in.

HE: Yeah, mostly. Maybe you had one or two men, but mostly it was women.

MN: Were there any women bosses?

HE: No, not while I was there.

MN: Did any of the women want to be?

HE: Not that I knew of.

MN: 'Cause you know, like today, the company gets in trouble if they don't have women bosses.

HE: They had 'em, they had 'em in Simplex.

MN: At, when you went there?

HE: Not when, yeah, when I went there, but then after they had little, couple more.

MN: Did any of the women get together and say, "Why aren't we bosses?" at Heywood-Wakefield?

HE: No.

MN: It seems to me, you know--

HE: Not that I know of.

MN: You know, people didn't occur to them. They'd be doing

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their jobs, there would be no women bosses, maybe they even got different pay from the men. And they wouldn't think to complain. Do you think you got different pay from the men?

HE: Umm, no.

MN: But they did different kinds of jobs.

HE: Like when I was spraying stain, I got the same as the other one was getting. So--

MN: And when you were there, did you, there was already a union, wasn't there?

HE: Yes.

MN: Did you join the union?

HE: You had to or you couldn't get in. You had to or they wouldn't hire you.

MN: Oh, I thought that was voluntary?

HE: No, not when I was--

MN: And that was the CIO, right? Did, was it expensive?

HE: Well, I'll tell you, it wasn't worth it.

MN: That was my next question, anyway. Yeah, why not?

HE: Well, they'd only give you a nickel or a dime raise, and then they'd raise your union dues up, so there's your union, you know what I mean, there goes your pay. Simplex we got raises without the union and we got good raises. 50¢ an hour.

MN: Hmmm. And what else is different between Heywood-Wakefield and Simplex?

HE: Oh, I don't know, I liked the company to work for. They were very, very good. Very good.

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MN: Simplex? So what they do for you?

HE: Whatever they could.

MN: You said you got a pension there after only ten years?

HE: I got a pension, yeah. They had the lobster party for you in the summer, retirees and all, they have a big Christmas party and they give you a gift, and they bring you a big Christmas box, about a hundred dollars worth of stuff.

MN: Each person?

HE: Those that are retired. We used to get our bonus, those that are not retired, they give you a bonus.

MN: At Christmas?

HE: So what else can you ask for? They were so good to work for, it seems that everybody would pitch together and help you if you don't know something. If they knew the job, all right, they'll help you. Another thing when I worked about Simplex and I didn't like about Heywood's, if you did your job say, you were on your own job down at Heywood's and somebody didn't know your job and he asked you to come in for overtime and the one that didn't know your job said, "I've got seniority, I'm going to come in instead.", they took you in because they had the seniority which was not right.

MN: So you couldn't work the overtime, the one who was senior would get it?

HE: No, because the one that had seniority did it and it was a job I knew. But at Simplex, you're doing your own job and if they want to put you on another job, they ask you if you

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want overtime, you do, you work. There was nothing like Heywood's. That's what I didn't like about Heywood's, about that seniority. When I went to work in another paint shop he came after me to spray, from 4:00 to 5:00 overtime and work Saturday mornings. And this one woman never sprayed and she said, "I'm going, I got the seniority over her."

MN: Is this at Heywood's?

HE: Under the union. So like he says to me, "I got to take her and I got to start teaching her." Well, I, take her. That's what I didn't like down there.

MN: And that was because of the union?

HE: Oh, yeah, they had a union, yeah.

MN: No, I mean the seniority was--

HE: You got to go by seniority down Heywood's. So whether you knew the job or not. And like he says, he's gonna lose on account of somebody that didn't know the job and he had to teach them. Well, I said, "That's seniority for you. Union."

MN: Do you wish they got rid of it?

HE: Well, I was hoping they would, but they wouldn't

MN: Do you think it did anybody any good?

HE: Maybe for some. The working conditions, that's about it, I'd say.

MN: Oh, it changed the working conditions?

HE: But over here we had no union, everything was good.

MN: And they didn't have seniority?

HE: Well, you can't complain, because they want you, they're gonna

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put you to work, whether you're seniority or not. When you work, they'll ask you, and if not, they'll get somebody else. That knows the job, too.

MN: You could say no, if you wanted.

HE: Oh, yeah, you could.

MN: Did they have conveyor belts at Simplex?

HE: No.

MN: 'Cause it sounded like you had more time, if somebody needed your help, you could go and help them, but at Heywood's--

HE: Heywood's had, no we didn't have no conveyor down at Simplex.

MN: At Heywood's, did you have time to help somebody else if they needed help?

HE: Oh, yeah, you have time.

MN: What about Heywood's? Didn't they have parties, Christmas parties, other kinds of thing.

HE: Yeah, but you pay for them. You had to go pay, like a corn roast or something, you paid. Over here you don't pay nothing.

MN: Oh, I see, when I was reading the Shop News and they would always talk about these parties, but it didn't say you had to pay.

HE: Corn roast, all that? Oh, yeah, you didn't work for nothing.

MN: What about at Christmas, would they do anything for you?

HE: No.

MN: They would give you these pins if you worked a long time, right?

HE: Yeah, what good is that? Mine is laying in my jewelry box.

MN: It'd be nice, I suppose, if you gave a person a nice piece of roast beef, or something?

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HE: Turkey, or something.

MN: Did it, umm, did you get to know George Heywood at the company?

HE: Yeah, you get to know them all, shake hands when they come by. They'll talk with you.

MN: Did it matter to you?

HE: Did it what?

MN: Was it important that these people came around?

HE: They came around to look, I guess, to see how things were going. Didn't bother me any, kept on working, you know.

MN: Did they do that at Simplex, too?

HE: Oh yeah, they went around there, too. Oh, yeah.

MN: So you'd get to know Watkins?

HE: Oh, yeah. Very nice to know.

MN: Because some of these other companies, I guess, I mean you don't know who owns it even, they're someplace else.

HE: Oh, yeah, he used to go around. Vice-president, uh, Phil upstairs, the big guys, after a while, you get to know 'em, they come and talk to you right at your bench you know. I know I was going to retire, vice-president asked me, "Don't retire, " he said, "you seem to know a lot of jobs here." you know, this and that, and I says, "No, I'm ready."

MN: But it's nice, though, they wanted you to stay?

HE: So. Oh, yeah, they wanted me to stay, my boss, he was begging me to, you know. Well, they preferred the old, the help that knew quite a bit of work, too, they asked all the older

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help that's ready retire, can't you stay another year or so, you know. So.

MN: That's nice 'cause some companies are trying to get you out the door.

HE: Yeah, no not down here, they were good. Especially to the older people.

MN: Did they do that at Heywood-Wakefield, too? I mean ask you to stay, obviously they were closing when you were there, but before that, it was going to close, would they ask the older people?

MN: Oh, yeah, they would. If you gave your notice, they asked you.

MN: Did they have, did you read the Shop News at Heywood-Wakefield, or did they have a--

HE: We had the Shop News then, yeah.

MN: Did you read it? Were people interested?

HE: Yeah, we get the Shop News from here, too. I get it to the house.

MN: Oh, they deliver to your house?

HE: Simplex does.

MN: Oh, they have their own newspaper, too?

HE: Oh, yeah.

MN: And you still get it? And they had a Heywood-Wakefield social club, didn't they?

HE: You paid for that.

MN: Did they have a Simplex social club?

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HE: No.

MN: But they still had social things, anyway.

HE: They had the social events without a club. Then they have down at Simplex, you can have anywhere's from 2% to 6% taken out from your pay and Watkin's gives you 50¢ on every dollar you put in. So when you get out of there, you have a terrific savings account.

MN: So if you put in a dollar, he put in 50¢?

HE: Yeah. How many are going to do that?

MN: Hmm, that's good. And plus you get the pension?

HE: Yeah.

MN: So I guess they don't have any trouble getting employees?

HE: No.

MN: 'Cause I see the furniture company has trouble.

HE: Yeah, but down here, it's some of these young ones, you know how it is. They want to get started on, I guess, \$10 an hour or so, or some don't stay long down here, either.

'Cause when I was there, some would stay for a while and they'd quit. Anyway, they worked when they felt like it.

MN: Was it piecework at Simplex?

HE: Some are and some aren't.

MN: Were you?

HE: I was piecework, yeah.

MN: So some weeks, you would get more than other weeks?

HE: Oh, yeah. Then they ask you if you want to come in from about 6:00 in the morning and work till about 5:00 at night.

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I went in. And I worked Saturday mornings. Then there were other jobs, some would work Sundays. If they needed the job, they'd work Sunday.

MN: And they'd get overtime?

HE: Oh, yeah, double time. And holidays, I guess, is triple time, yeah. But, see, the people that do it, because it's really a good company. Really. Can't knock Simplex down.

MN: Did most of the people feel, I mean, the older people would feel loyal to it?

HE: Oh, yeah.

MN: What about the young ones?

HE: Yeah, they like to work there. They say where else would they get what they're getting there?

MN: Did you care what you were making, if you were making a chair or a clock or a burglar alarm?

HE: Well, you sign, they post jobs and you sign for them. Then they come and interview you and--

MN: At Simplex?

HE: Yeah.

MN: But I mean, did it matter to you at Simplex you were making clocks and at Heywood-Wakefield you were making chairs and tables?

HE: Oh, I'd rather make clocks. Any day.

MN: What about you and the paint shop? You said you inhaled, would inhale some of the--

HE: Well, you in-, inhale all those fumes when they spray, they're spraying all around there, you know.

MN: Did you ever have any health problems or breathing problems?

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HE: No. But I had a mastectomy, but --, as soon as I, I was, as soon as I got out of there I, that wasn't of any help.

MN: But you probably couldn't prove a direct relationship.

HE: No, but--

MN: You think about it. Did you hear of any other women with similiar things from the paint?

HE: Oh, yeah, that worked over there, oh yeah.

MN: Were certain cancer related problems?

HE: There were quite a bit that had it. But we can't really say it's from that, but--

MN: Yeah, but it seems like it.

HE: They claim alot of the cancer you get now is job related.

MN: Absolutely.

HE: With all the chemicals, and everything. Yeah.

MN: Would they give you sick benefits at Heywood-Wakefield if you were sick?

HE: Um hmm.

MN: Did they ever lay you off when you were there?

HE: No.

MN: So you came right after the strikes. Right?

HE: Oh, yeah, I, yeah. No right after, but quite a few years after.

MN: Didn't they have some strikes in the '60's. Weren't they almost going to close?

HE: Once they had a strike. I don't know how long it lasted or anything.

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MN: Do you remember anything about that?

HE: No, I didn't work then.

MN: Were there any kind of loyalty to Heywood-Wakefield?

HE: No, I don't know.

MN: And what about when it closed. How did you feel when the company closed?

HE: I wasn't there. I was at Simplex all ready.

MN: So you knew it was going to close, right?

HE: I knew, that's why I left.

MN: And what, were people talking about it, or--?

HE: Yeah, and alot were leaving.

MN: Did they announce they were closing?

HE: No, they says, "It's only rumours."

MN: But the people still knew. Were they sad, I mean, was there any feeling about it?

HE: I don't know how it was towards the end. 'Cause I was out of there, quite a while, three or four years before they closed, so--.

MN: Would you see any people that you used to work with at Heywood-Wakefield's?

HE: Yeah, I see 'em.

MN: 'Cause I wonder if people got friends with the people at work and then saw them later at home.

HE: Oh, yeah, you see a lot of them.

MN: 'Cause I know, sometimes I ask one person, "Did you get friends with the guys you worked with?" And he said, "Well, I liked them when I was there, but when I went home, I didn't

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associate with them. They were all the people I knew from my church."

HE: Yeah.

MN: And a lot of people were involved with their families.

HE: Yeah, you just go there and you're friends with them at work, you talk with them and everything and most all of them, that's how they were.

MN: But when you went home, they wouldn't go out together?

HE: No, no, no. You have your own friends at home.

MN: Where do you get them? Neighborhood, church, or what?

HE: I don't know where you, I don't know, really.

MN: Do you belong to the Golder Agers?

HE: Go where?

MN: Do you belong to any of these clubs now?

HE: No, I never did belong to any clubs.

MN: Well, sometimes the church has--

HE: No, because clubs, you don't have time to go to, I didn't have time to go to clubs. 'Cause I used to work a lot of overtime. You come home, you're in no mood to go out.

MN: I can relate to that.

HE: (laughs)

MN: And you have kids, right?

HE: Married.

MN: How many?

HE: Two.

MN: And I guess they must have kids, huh, do you have grandchildren?

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HE: Five, and a great-grandson.

MN: Oh, really? Are they living around here?

HE: I got a son up in Florida, my oldest granddaughter is going to graduate from college May 8th, so, from Missouri, so I'm gonna fly up there.

MN: Have you ever been there?

HE: To Missouri? No. This is the first time I'm going.

MN: Did you ever fly?

HE: Oh, I've been to 14 countries already.

MN: Oh. So you're a traveler.

HE: I've been to Egypt, Israel, Greece, Poland, Austria, Morocco, Portugal, I've been around.

MN: Since you retired or before?

HE: Before.

MN: You going this summer?

HE: No, I'm not traveling this summer, I was in England last year, in April, I traveled too much, I'm going to rest.

MN: Would you go during your summer vacation?

HE: Well, I'm going to Missouri, then I'm going down to Illinois to my daughter-in-law's parents for vacation, but that's enough already.

MN: No, but I mean, before.

HE: And I was, did I go?

MN: In summers before, when you went to Europe?

HE: Oh, yeah, I've had enough vacations. You get sick of it.

MN: Well, that's something, though. I'm a little jealous. (laughs)

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All those countries.

HE: Well, it costs.

MN: Yeah, but, I mean, you can buy yourself a new car or you can go to Europe, but in a way, Europe lasts longer.

HE: You see things that you don't see around here.

MN: You know, about the work, I had another question. Do you think things were different for women than for men at the different places you worked at?

HE: Umm, I don't know, I think our wages were the same.

MN: Were the conditions that you worked under?

HE: Was just about the same, I would say.

MN: So you didn't feel that they discriminated against you?

HE: No, I don't think they did.

MN: Well, sometimes some of the women would have romances with the bosses because they thought they would get ahead?

HE: They did there.

MN: At Heywood-Wakefield?

HE: Oh,

MN: You're not the first person who says this to me.

HE: They really did.

MN: And then they would get a promotion, or they just did it?

HE: I don't know, I know I caught one, was awful.

MN: Wouldn't they think if they lost their job or be worried or something?

HE: Well, they didn't care. They don't care.

MN: Who, the men or the women?

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HE: Both, I guess, otherwise they wouldn't do it. I think it happens in all the shops.

MN: At Simplex, too?

HE: It must, I don't know.

MN: But there would probably be a lot of gossip at Heywood-Wakefield anyway.

HE: Heywood-Wakefield, everybody knew who the bosses went, everything.

MN: And they probably thought it was so secret. Would the bosses date alot of the women?

HE: Oh, I know one was trying to date, she wouldn't go out with him. He said, "You'll get a good raise." She said, "Keep your raise."

MN: And he didn't try to get her transferred to another place or--

HE: No, he couldn't. The union.

MN: So it protects a little bit, I guess. Would they ever complain about such things, like would she ever bring that to the union?

HE: No, they didn't complain.

MN: _____(unintelligible) alot of people would be married. Would the women get together by themselves for the lunch, or a break?

HE: Yeah, sit together and eat.

MN: Did you have a separate room to eat? Where would you go?

HE: No, we eat, ate at our bench.

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MN: Just stop the belt conveyor?

HE: Yeah.

MN: And would the men eat there, too, or would they have their own place?

HE: Oh, they usually, some went home for lunch, you know.

MN: How long did you get for lunch?

HE: One hour.

MN: So you would have enough time to eat and talk.

HE: Oh, yeah, yeah, you had enough.

MN: Did they have a kind of lunch room or something? Or machines to sell food?

HE: No, they had machines, I don't know if they were selling food. I know this sold cold drinks and milk.

MN: So you brought your lunch.

HE: Yeah.

MN: Did you ever go to a restaurant?

HE: Once in a while, we would.

MN: But usually people ate there?

HE: We mostly, we ate there.

MN: Did you come home?

HE: No.

MN: By the time you get home, it's time to get back.

HE: By the time you make a sandwich or something, but then what else have you got time for?

MN: 'Cause I know this one women said, she saw a lot of people sitting outside. The men would sit outside, but she never saw

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the women sitting out eating.

HE: No.

MN: Wait, I just want to check my, I had some questions I was going to ask you, and see if I forgot to ask you anything. Oh yeah, there's one thing I was going to ask you. Were there any kind of jobs that you told them you wouldn't do? You might start, but--

HE: No, I did everything they told me to do. I never refused.

MN: Oh, and that's the other thing. What about the ladies that were working that had children? What did they do with their kids?

HE: I don't know. I have no idea.

MN: Were there young women working there who had kids?

HE: Oh, yeah. I imagine they had babysitters.

MN: But the company didn't have day care.

HE: No.

MN: Oh, and did they try to modernize, you know, over time, the company, like get new machines or--

HE: Umm, no, not that I know of.

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END OF INTERVIEW